Informant: LMP-S9 **Language: Spanish**
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Claudia: Which botanicas were around when you established your botanica?

S9: All of the botanicas.

CH: And you told me that you don't know how long they've been around or which one is the oldest.

S9: Not really but I can guess that they were probably the ones in the city of El Monte.

CH: Have you seen others that were established but that were unsuccessful and had to leave?

S9: No, they've all stayed in business.

CH: What is the ethnic make up of the people in the community? Have they always been Latinos?

S9: The majority have always been Latinos because of the area.

CH: When did you establish your botanica, here?

S9: The 4th of July of 1999.

CH: Do you own any other botanicas?

S9: No, just this one.

CH: Do you work with any other botanica?

S9: No, none, we are independent.

CH: Are you the only owner, you and your family or do you have another business partner?

S9: No, only my family.

CH: Do you have employees?

S9: Yes, two.

CH: Family or common people?

S9: Common people.

CH: What is the religious orientation of your botanica?

S9: None.

CH: What is the difference between your botanicas and others?

S9: The difference is that we work only with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) and that I know of, there is no other botanica that works with "The Holy Death" (***Santa Muerte***).

CH: Who is "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***)?

S9: God gives us life and "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) takes it away. The fact that we work with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) does not mean it is something bad. A lot of people think it is something bad but it's not. Just as it is useful for good things it is useful for bad things too.

CH: I understand that it is useful for love related issues. I have heard that it is associated with things that have to do with love.

S9: Yes, for everything. It works for everything, to do good and bad things but always under a just cause, not just because!

CH: Your clients…what would be the percentage of Latinos, Blacks, Whites, Asians, that come to see you?

S9: Ninety-nine percent are Latino and about one percent of the rest.

CH: How do you attract your clientele?

S9: With time you build a clientele and of course with publicity, it's the most important part of any business.

CH: What kind of publicity?

S9: We are advertised in some magazines, cards, and flyers.

CH: I'm going to ask you questions about yourself now. Are you a spiritual specialist or a religious healer, like a (***curandero)***?

S9: No, not a (***curandero)***. Here, we have two people that work in the botanica and they dedicate their entire time to doing that kind of work and we also have a person that gives massages (***sobador***) that is available. He is a guaranteed masseuse with lots of experience – with over thirty years of experience doing this kind of work.

CH: So you don't have the sense that they are like a Spiritist or nothing like that?

S9: No, not really.

CH: And do you have any spiritual ability that is special? For example there are some people that have the ability to fall into a trance and talk to the spirits and there are others that can look at a person and can tell what is wrong with the person, just by looking at them. Do you have that kind of ability?

S9: Well, I don't have any abilities. I only work with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) and I do various jobs with that just like the other people that work in this botanica, but I do not consider…well often there are people that are phonies! They are theatrical, sometimes they claim to go into a trance and its pure lies. We don't work like that here, but I would say that many people that claim they can do that are out to make a buck.

CH: Can I ask you how you work with "The Holy Death" (***La Santisima Muerte***)? Do you have to give some sort of offering?

S9: Yes, in fact, any saint needs to be catered to, not only "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***), you have…I've always said that you can believe in any saint that you want and if you have faith things will happen for you. Independently of the saint and religion that it might belong to, I've always said that it is faith and patience that matters. We always have "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) and we offer her water, tequila, flowers, and fruits. That is what we always put out for her.

CH: What type of flowers and fruits does she prefer?

S9: Usually we put out red ones. The color of The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte)*** is red or black and sometimes white, it depends - white expresses appreciation and red is her personal color, while black is the color used for her works. Generally, we offer her candy and tequila - that should always be present.

CH: And the fruit?

S9: Fruits, like oranges or apples.

CH: Is there any symbolic meaning behind the apples and oranges? Are they for anything in particular or not?

S9: Not in particular but it depends on the saint. For example, if we place something for **Yemaya**, the goddess of the sea, it would be watermelon. Other saints might be offered apples or pears. The Holy Death (La Santa ***Muerte)*** has always been offered oranges and apples, or on some occasions just candy and flowers.

CH: And how did you begin to work in botanicas?

S9: Because of a man that works here with us. I knew him for a while and knew that he worked doing this kind of stuff. I began to develop an interest and I started my training to do that line of work.

CH: So, he has been like your teacher?

S9: He's the one that usually works here.

CH: Have you been studying with him since this store opened?

S9: Yes, since before that.

CH: So you already had some knowledge when you opened the botanica?

S9: Yes, I already did. I had already studied about "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) and all that.

CH: And how old are you?

S9: Twenty-five. I was born January 29th, 1976.

CH: Were you born in Mexico?

S9: Yes.

CH: What part?

S9: In the state of Sinaloa.

CH: How long have you been here in the United States?

S9: About eight years.

CH: Quite a while.

S9: Yes, I just got back from taking a vacation.

CH: And before you met the man that works here, which has been your teacher, did your curiosity draw you to botanicas?

S9: Yes, I've always said that people that fall under my sign are very curious people. We are like cats, very mischievous, always sticking are hands where we shouldn't, we like things that are dark, things out of the ordinary, sticking our noses where it doesn't belong, even if we are told not to, curiosity killed the cat, so there we go. Things that are out of the ordinary and weird always got my attention. If a TV show were going to present something like that I would make it a point to check it out. I've always been drawn to those kinds of interesting things.

CH: Do you know how to read cards or palms?

S9: Cards.

CH: Tarot cards?

S9: Tarot and the Spanish deck.

CH: Are the Tarot and Spanish cards different?

S9: Yes, they generally give the same result but the difference is that the Tarot takes longer to set up because there are a lot more cards. In the Spanish deck you have fewer cards.

CH: Is there any other way you can divine people's problems besides using the cards, do you have another method? Do you palm read (***lee la mano***), smoke a cigar (***fumar el puro***), or use a glass of water (***leer el agua***)?

S9: Yes, the glass of water (***vaso con agua***), the egg cleansing (***limpia de huevo***), or with a candle. There are many methods of divination. Some take longer than others.

CH: With a cleansing (***limpia***) one can find out what is wrong with a person?

S9: Yes, with the egg cleansing ***(limpia de huevo***). You clean the person with the egg and anything bad that the person is carrying comes out in the egg.

CH: How does it look?

S9: It depends on how the egg comes out. Sometimes it can come out scrambled, with lots of bubbles or with many lines, but the significance is that it extracts all the stress, the person's problems so that the person can be left calm and cleaner, relieved of things, problems they have had within the course of their day. One can use the cards too, to find out what is going to happen, what is already happening, and what has happened to them. You can also use a candle.

CH: How do you use the candle?

S9: You light the candle and you prepare it for the person and you allow it to take its course and that is how you start to find out things. It can also be used to cleanse a person, to prevent problems, or to minimize their problems.

CH: Do you know how to read a cigar (***el puro***)?

S9: The cigar - we do that here, you can smoke it for San Simon or for "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***). It depends on what you are going to use it for.

CH: Oh, you have to smoke it for one or the other, to know what is wrong with the person? Or is it for the jobs?

S9: For jobs, to attract a person, to calm a person down, to drive someone nuts, it depends on what you want done, you might smoke one or three, or you might smoke a series of seven cigars (***siete puros***). It depends on the problem and what you want done.

CH: What would be the most popular method that you have here, the most popular service?

S9: Working with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***), we do everything with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***).

CH: When people come to consult with you, do you recommend that they buy a religious object, like a statue of San Simon, or "The Holy Death" (***La Santisima Muerte***)? Do you make that recommendation?

S9: No, I do not recommend that they buy anything unless it is something that they are going to need, of coarse, like a candle or something like that. But, I am not going to make someone have some bundle if they do not want it. The only thing that I ask is that the person believes in what they are doing, that's it.

CH: Is there a statue that you think is most popular, that sells?

S9: That I sell to the people?

CH: Yes, the statue people ask for the most?

S9: The one people ask for the most - there are many. Sometimes people come in and ask for San Simon, also "The Holy Death? (***La Santa Muerte***). There are quite a few, (***San Martin Caballero***), (***El Santo Niño***), (***Santa Barbara***).

CH: How long did you say you've lived in Los Angeles?

S9: About eight years.

CH: And before having your botanica did you work from your home?

S9: Yes.

CH: Doing the spiritual thing?

S9: Yes, sometimes. I had another job, I have another job and sometimes I would work together with the man.

CH: Do you have any other family members that work in botanicas or something spiritual?

S9: No, I'm the only one.

CH: Can I ask you about some of the products you have, and how they are used?

S9: Yes.

CH: For example, candles, how do you use the candles?

S9: You can use them in many different ways. You do not necessarily have to use candles as an offering for a saint. Sometimes you might need to relax and be at peace. You can take candles home and light them to feel more relaxed. Sometimes candles can bring you tranquility and inner peace. You can take a bath and light some candles in your bathroom, and you will feel more relaxed and tranquil. Other times you can use candles for the saints, or for different kinds of jobs. Candles have different uses.

CH: When you use candles for a job, is it something that the person can take to their home and do on their own, or is it something that you have to prepare?

S9: Most of the time we do the jobs here. We always do them here, and the candles are lit here, unless the person comes and wants a candle that is prepared for whatever reason. Then we do it, but if it's about a job that is being done, we do the job here, we burn the candles here. Everything is done here.

CH: When a person wants a prepared candle, how do you prepare it? For example…what is the method of preparation?

S9: There are different ways. It depends on what you want it for. If you want it for good luck, you prepare the candle with the seven powers incense (***inciencio de las siete potencias***), with gold dust (***polvo de oro***), with some coins ***(monedas***), with rosemary (***romero***) that is always for good luck. One can also use rue (***ruda***), and every time that a candle is prepared you have to pray to the "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***), well not a prayer but you plead to the "Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***).

CH: For what the person wants?

S9: Yes.

CH: And do you put all those things in the candle?

S9: Yes.

CH: And that's for these candles?

S9: For the candles.

CH: What is the difference between the candles that are not encased in glass? Is there a difference between the use of these and these?

S9: These last longer and they are more practical. If a person is going to use it in their home for whatever saint, they usually take this one because the other one requires more caution. There is more of a risk that it may fall or something. The other ones are usually used for jobs.

CH: Are there….between the candles are there many different colors, is there a meaning in the different colors that there are?

S9: Often, people think or guide themselves by the colors but I've always believed that the colors have nothing to do with it. Sometimes it does, for example, with "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) I use a white candle to express appreciation for something she has done or given me. I always use black candles for "The Holy Death" (***La Santisima Muerte***). I rarely use another color. I can use red but that is in case I don't have black, but I always use black. I feel that it is more powerful.

CH: So there is no significance to the colors?

S9: Well there is some significance but I don't really believe in that. Many people guide themselves with for example, white for tranquility, hope, and appreciation, blue and green for money, black for powerful jobs, yellow in appreciation for jobs that involve children, red for love, but I don't make any distinction.

CH: Do you sell necklaces or chains, or how do you say…..

S9: Amulets.

CH: Yes, amulets.

S9: Yes.

CH: Do you make them here or do you buy them already made?

S9: No, we make them here.

CH: Can you give me an example of how you make them?

S9: In different ways-we buy the rock, we buy the string, the clasps (***broches***) and we make different kinds. Some are red others are black, or red with black. We make different kinds, and people choose what they want. We use different rocks as well.

CH: And with amulets does the color have a meaning?

S9: It depends on the person, because a person comes in to look for an amulet and pick it based on the color. They might want a red or black one. If someone asks me for a red and black one I'm not going to tell them to take a black one, but like I told you before if you have faith in what you believe then things will work out for you. If you have faith that the red one will help you then it will help you! The only thing that matters is that you have faith in what you are doing. One should believe in what one is doing, and should not be misguided by others. I've always said that one should be an independent thinker, and be the person that you want to be, not concerning yourself with pleasing others but rather pleasing yourself, because in the end the one who suffers is yourself. If you want to be like you want to be – you should come first and then everybody else. So if I want a red necklace…if a person asks for a red necklace and he/she has faith, then it will help them, it will!

CH: And when you make the amulets do you have to make a prayer for each amulet or some petition?

S9: When the person comes back to pick up the amulet, that is when I do it. Prayer and healing is put into it.

CH: And it can be made with different types of things?

S9: Oh yes, an infinity of things. It depends.

CH: Do you know what "tincture of paintings" (***Tintura de Llamas***) are?

S9: ***Tintura*** or????

CH: Tincture (***tintura***).

S9: No.

CH: Herb soaps?

S9: Yes we have those. We have rosemary (***romero***), sweet basil (***albahaca***), and rue (***ruda***) soaps. We have many different flavors. We have Aloe Vera (***savila***), neutral soap (***jabon neutro***), and avocado soap. Many!

CH: And do you have any that is most popular with people?

S9: The Rosemary (***romero***) one.

CH: Because it is for?

S9: It's for the face. Yes, Rosemary soap is very good.

CH: And perfumes (***perfumes***), powders (***polvos)*** and oils (***aceites***)?

S9: We have them as well.

CH: Which ones and how do you use the powders (***polvos***) and oils (***aceites***)?

S9: The oils (***aceites***) are different you can use them in the candles, mostly in the candles, the oils are for different things, to make someone leave you or bring someone to you, for love, work, good luck, to avoid problems, so that problems don't come all day, for all kinds of things, or you can use it on the person, you can use it in or after a bath. After using the soap you can use the oil. It's the same for powders (***polvos***). You can place them in the place where the person passed or you can sprinkle the person with them, it depends on what it's for, for work, to bring good luck, you sprinkle yourself with the powder (***polvo***). So that the person will live peacefully you just sprinkle it near that person. There are many things you can do.

CH: And the salts (***sales***)? There is red salt (***sal roja***), black salt (***sal negra***), and blue salt (***sal azul***), all those salts?

S9: Some of those salts (***sales***) are used for good luck, others are used to keep enemies away, to keep bad neighbors away or salt for…to keep business envy away.

CH: How do you use it, for example, for keeping the neighbor away?

S9: Oh, you just put it on the neighbor's door.

CH: Does it matter if the neighbor's door is closed or open?

S9: Well, of coarse it has to be closed otherwise the neighbor is going to see you doing it.

CH: Then they are going to get mad and are going to????, o.k.
But if you throw salt on a person, what is expected will happen with the person? That they simply leave or that something will happen to the person?

S9: Just that they will go away. It depends, if you want the person to simply stop bothering you, not that you are wishing harm upon them –

CH: Something strong.

S9: No, no, no, "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) will never punish without a reason. She punishes when there is a justified reason. It's not like the person will suddenly get run over by a car. That's not going to happen. The purpose is basically to have things calm down, and to have the neighbors stop bugging and have them keep away some.

CH: And for good luck how do you use the salt for good luck?

S9: You rub it on you and like I have said before, faith is very important. Go out with high spirits (***animo***), with faith (***fe***), and always do things in good faith (***de buena voluntad***). Wake up in the morning and be in high spirits. It is a very important thing to create good energy for yourself so that you can do things well, because if you don't help yourself no one will. Like God said, help yourself, "help yourself and I shall help you" (***ayudate que yo te ayudare***). You always have to be… Independently of the jobs you might do, you have to be a person that is compliant and not negative, but generous, compliant and giving without expecting something in return. God always compensates, and "The Holy Death" (***La Santisima Muerte***) in due time, also compensates.

CH: You sell statues. Do you sell any plants?

S9: No we don't sell any plants. We have plants but they are for here. We use them for good luck in business.

CH: What products sell the most? Of the ones we've talked?

S9: The candles.

CH: Is there any one candle in particular that sells more?

S9: The one for "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***).

CH: And are there different seasons when some candles sell more than "The Holy Death" (***La Santa Muerte***) candles?

S9: Yes, we sell a lot of the humming-bird (***Chupa Rosa***) candle, The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***) one, and the single colored candles that do not have an image on the front.

CH: What product is sold the least?

S9: I wouldn't know because even if it's just a little something it gets sold. We also sell teas.

CH: And do you know about medicinal plants, do you have knowledge of that?

S9: No. Why should I lie to you, no.

CH: And your clients, do they have more faith in the products that have to do with The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***) or does everyone have their own thing?

S9: No, it is The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***) of coarse because we work with The Holy Death.

(Tape cuts off for a moment)

S9: The clients that come here are told that we work with The Holy Death (***La Santisima Muerte***) and if they want the work done then it is done, if not then…

CH: Ok, do you have a particular product that you prefer, that you have most faith in?

S9: My Holy Death (***Mi Santa Muerte***). Only her.

CH: And I remember that last time we spoke you told me about a connection you had with The Holy Death (***La Santisama Muerte***). Could you tell me more about your relationship with The Holy Death (***La Santisama Muerte***)?

S9: OH, well, I was given to The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***), just like the other man that works here. Years ago he was also given to her and he gave me to her as well. I have a very close relationship with The Holy Death (***La Santisima Muerte***), not just anyone - the clients that come here, get work done for them with The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***) but we are given to The Holy Death (***La Santa Muerte***).

CH: What does it mean to be given?

S9: To be given means that in some way we depend on her, we are given to her in body, soul, mind, and everything.

CH: And that's done by way of prayer or something?

S9: Yes, it's a process that takes time. You have to fast for seven days. In those seven days you have to really think about whether you sincerely want to give yourself to her, because it requires a lot of sacrifices in the way of losing many things. You gain many things, but you also lose a lot of things so you have to really think about it because there is no going back. The person that does it has to be very brave because there is no going back. She gives a lot but she also takes a lot and so the person has to be….

CH: Prepared for that.

S9: Yes, and that's why you do the seven days, so that you can think things through, because after you do that, you can never go back ever. You will belong only to her.

CH: You are like her messengers?

S9: You could say that we are like her servants.

CH: If you want we can end here.

S9: Ok.

CH: Thank you.

*****END OF TAPE*****